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SCHOOLMEN have argued, philosophers reasoned, and divines labored, to give any adequate idea of infinity, in vain. The metaphysical subtilties with which the theological world has been overwhelmed upon this mysterious subject, have only tended to perplex and to puzzle, and to throw darkness over the

theirs they were meant to illuminate. The corrupted and unintelligible jargon of the middle & latter ages, has only thrown greater difficulties into the investigation of mysterious and not wholly revealed subjects of human inquiry, as connected with the divine attributes, or the divine operations. And it is assuredly a sign of the progressive improvement of the mind in the present age, that these absurd modes of reasoning are abandoned, and the more clear and simple operations of reason and revelation had recourse to, instead of the time being wasted in fruitless speculations, and minute investigations.

In directing our thoughts to infinity, immensity, and eternity, we soon find ourselves lost and compounded. The subject is too grand for finite comprehension; too lofty for earthly conception. It is easy to speak of boundless space, & infinite extension; but when we come to apply our mind to the contemplation, when we search in vain for the limits of creation, for some spot where space may be bounded, we feel per-

plexed and bewildered. The "flammantia mœnia mundi," of Lucretius, or as Gray has more elegantly expressed it, "the flaming bounds of space & time," – exist only in the imagination of the bard. We can form some idea of distance, though its extent seems to imply infinity, when Milton says of Satan —

> ——— Plumb down he drops
> Ten thousand fathom deep, & to this hour
> Down had been falling, had not by ill chance
> The strong rebuff of some tumultuous cloud,
> Instinct with fire & nitre, hurried him
> As many miles aloft; &c. [a]

But when he describes the "hoary deep" of chaos, as

> ——— a dark
> Illimitable ocean, without bound,
> Without dimension; where length, breadth, and height,
> And time, and place, are lost; — [b]

the mind seems to wander like the erratic orb of the comet, without bourne, or resting place, amid the infinite expansion of boundless space. It is an extent which we cannot reach, and which no human art can explain.

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[a] Paradise Lost, Book ii, v. 933

[b] Ib. ii, v. 891.

In the same manner, the idea of eternity is utterly incapable of being conveyed to our finite minds. The variety of absurd theories that have been invented to explain it, or to do it away, is a sufficient proof of our incompetence to grasp so mighty a conception. It admits of a doubt whether angels & glorified spirits themselves, have a clear comprehension of its mysteries. Of an eternity to come; of an endless succession of actions commencing with the present moment, or at any definite period, we can make some estimate; at least, we are not utterly confounded. But of a past eternity we can form no conception whatever. Behind the highest assignable retrogression of years, there is still an eternity — a duration which has known no beginning, and in which time is but a transient and ~~[illegible]~~ incongruous cloud. That beautiful and melancholy minstrel, Henry Kirke White, seems to have thought thus, when he sings —

——— Oh who can strive
To comprehend the vast, the awful truth,
Of the ETERNITY THAT HATH GONE BY,

And not recoil from the dismaying sense
Of human impotence? ———

And again —

——— The past Eternity! —
We comprehend a future without end;
We feel it possible that ever-on years
May roll forever; but we think amaz'd —
We stand aghast, when we reflect that Time
Knew no commencement. That heap age on age,
And million upon million, without end,
And we shall never span the void of days
That were, and are not but in retrospect.
The past is an unfathomable depth,
Beyond the span of thought; 'tis an elapse
Which hath no mensuration, but hath been
Forever & forever! — a

The ~~circle~~ hieroglyphic circle of the Egyptians, and the round temples of the Romans, with the circular motions of the Samian sage[b], were but faint & insufficient emblems of a never-beginning, never ending duration. And when from the idea of bare duration we carry up our ideas to God; when we reflect upon an infinitely wise, powerful, and glorious being, enthroned in that eternity, and himself without

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a White's Remains. Time, a Poem.

b Pythagoras made his pupils walk in a circular motion, to intimate the idea of eternity.

beginning, how does the soul shrink from the contemplation, dizzy at the prospect, and dazzled with the awful blaze of a mysterious eternity.

It is the absurd and fruitless speculations of philosophers, falsely so called, that have led many into infidelity and open atheism. When we once begin to refine upon things, to which reason does not reach, and which the intellect cannot grasp, we run great risque of plunging ourselves into a gulf of doubts, and of being involved in a labyrinth, where we may remain and perish. Because we cannot explain what we are unable to understand, we are too ready to set it down as an impossibility, and to take refuge in unbelief from the imperfections of our minds. Men have reasoned upon the being & attributes of God, till they came to the profound conclusion, that the world had no Deity to govern it; they have quibbled upon matter and mind, substance & spirit, entity and non-entity, till they have actually doubted of their own existence. It would be curious to collect all the hypotheses

of philosophers, and observe what they have each rejected. Were we to follow them all in their turn, we should soon find ourselves in this lamentable condition; that there is neither a God, nor an immortal soul, nor existent matter; that we ourselves are but the ideal phantasms of a strange & unaccountable dream, and that the forms we behold, the objects we love, are but the creatures of a vain and fantastic imagination. The boasted pride of reason has thus led into the grossest errors, and the most contradictory absurdities. The pomp of intellect, and the vaunted prerogatives of genius, have only served to swell the triumph of infidelity, and enter in her train of dishonorable exultations. The impious extravagancies of the Gnostics and Platonics have been surpassed by the horrible blasphemies and contemptible fooleries of modern philosophy; and it has been the disgraceful prerogative of the eighteenth century, to have been above all other ages fertile in atheism and apostacy, in schemes of impiety, and scenes of blood, horror, and atrocity.

But to return. While these views & speculations of those who would be called the wise ones of the earth, serve to convince us of the imbecillity of human reason, & the impotence of human arrogance, we are led, under right impressions of these awful subjects, to feel our humbleness and lowliness in the sight of Him, who alone inhabits eternity. We feel how infinitely beneath him we lie, and are forced to acknowledge, that without his assistance, intellect is vain, genius without object, speculation futile, and reason delusive. We come unto the revealed declaration of his will, as the only means of obtaining a right knowledge of his attributes, and are convinced that it is not for mortal man to penetrate, where God hath placed a boundary to his views. The turbulent billows of the human mind must be ~~stayed~~ visited by a heavenly barrier", and there must their proud waves be staid."-

We conclude these loose and desultory observations with presenting to the perusal of the reader a few frag-

ments of an unpublished, and indeed unfinished poem on "Eternity", the subject being connected with that of the present number.

* * * * *

O what created eye shall dare to scan
Th' unfathomable depth? What mortal gaze
Can pierce the vast profound, th' unbounded
Baffling all sounding, all sense, all thought? [void,
Would insect man the awful trial make?
Would the frail being of a passing hour,
That sports his painted wings upon the air,
And sinks into the tomb, presume to tell
The secrets of ETERNITY? — Fond fool,
Bounded in might and mind, lep hopeless task.
'Twere to count the many circling stars
That stud the glittering galaxy of heaven,
Innumerous & unknown. * * * *

* * * * We stand and gaze
From the wild steep upon the distant gulf,
And totter as we look. That shoreless deep,
That thing ineffable, which knows no end,
And no beginning, dizzies every sense,
And teaches to the humbled heart of him
Not quite too proud to learn, how weak and [low
And limited is man. That in the boast
Of wisdom, & the pride of intellect —
The vaunt of lofty genius, & the mouth
Of mind, misnomer'd mighty, — that in all,
We sink to vanity and lep than nought,
Since even these shall fail to pierce the depth
Of the immense unknown. The proudest skill
Of human mind must here at least confess

Its more than impotence, and humbled sink
Before the stern rebuke.

HE only knows,
Who reigns supreme, Eternity itself;
He — who, before the mountains to the sky
Heaved their wild forms, & spread their vasty sublime,
Had reigned without beginning; ere the earth
Shew'd her green vales, disporting in His ray
Who is her light and life and energy;
Ere thro' unmeasur'd space the countless worlds
Roll'd on their burning march; or sweetly sung
The stars of heaven their mystic melody: —
He only knows — the high and lofty one
Who on Eternity's extended breast
Dwells King supreme, the Everlasting Lord,
Who was — & is — and is to be forever!
Who, veiled in light ineffable himself,
Hath taught us by the mouths of holy men
To curb our pride, walk humbly, & adore.

* * * * *

Time was, when to the ken of mortal man
Few, faint, and dim the shadowy glimpses were
That heaven vouchsaf'd, of that sublimer state
Of being, far beyond the narrow bounds
That hold the spirit here. There was a time
When some few tidings of that land revealed
Led some to hope & feel that on this earth
They were but pilgrims. Others from the ray
Gleam'd a less certain light, & following on
The wild delusions of their evil hearts,
Rear'd wild & senseless schemes on which to brood,
Till light was lost. amid the darken'd world

Chain'd down in heathen bondage, & in night
Enthrall'd, a few uncertain beams were seen
That told of something yet to come; of climes
Where life was to be perfect. But the mind,
Perplex'd amid the mazes of its path,
Wandered in error. Man could not explore
The illimitable deep till taught by heaven.
The schemes of proud philosophy were vain,
Unblest by beams celestial; & the thoughts
Even of the wisest shrunk from the survey,
Where all was wild, without a shore or bound,
Billows on billows beating to the gaze,
No star with steady beam to light the gloom,
And point to hope & comfort.

All was dark;
Like men, who had made shipwreck of their hope,
They sat upon the shore, & look'd abroad,
And met no object. From their barren rock
They gazed upon the deep, & only felt
Some dark forebodings they could not define,
As tho' the mists that overhung the view
They strove to pierce. For them the lowly grave
Was but a passage of uncertain doom,
A drear abode of horrors. In the dust
They laid their bodies down, & scarcely dared
To think of an hereafter. Awful fell
Those shaded glimpses of eternity
On eyes that could not fathom them; the clouds
That thickened on their vision as it fail'd
Divided sad tidings of dismay and fear
To heart that could not shun the coming doom,
Or find one ray of hope. On fabled tales
They built their dying faith, & thought to share
In the mild pleasures of Elysian bowers,
Beyond the surgings of the troubled sea,

That roared upon them here; where doubt
should cease,
And certainty be theirs. Such dreams beguiled
Their dying hearts to slumber; but it was
A sleep like that o'er whose beginnings sad
The wildering night-mare revels, & dismays
With sounds of fear, & sights of dark affright,
Mingled with views of pleasures passing fast,
To sense forbidden, & to wish denied,
Blasting the gazer. * * *

* * * * * From the mountain heigh
The Chaldee look'd upon the starry sky,
To read the book of fate, & deem'd he saw
Amid those sparkling spheres his destiny;
While vagrant fancy on those orbs sublime
Pictur'd the home of spirits not of earth,
Immortal and transcendent; where the Gods
Rear'd their high halls, & spread their bright dom
Alas! beyond those stars he never look'd;
His eye upon them gazing, never pierced
To that which was beyond. The wings of thought
Din in their holiest & most rapture'd flight
Fail'd when they reach'd the confines of the sphe
That bounds our finite sight. As when on high
The daring eagle wings his way toward heav
Presumptuously he soars, and far above
Exults in his own majesty, and mocks
The pride of earth that lies so deep below,
Till in the thinner air, where never wing
Cut the bright ether, to his flagging plumes
No more support is given, & dash'd to earth
He mourns at once his trial and his loss.
So sunk the boast of elder time; so quail'd
The aspiring spirit, when no hand was seen

To bear it upward, and direct its flight
Where reason could not pierce, where fancy's self
Could scarcely paint the visions that might fall
Upon the uplifted eye, when grandly rose
The awful shrine of the Omnipotent,
The throne of the Eternal, but as yet
Unopen'd to observance. * * *

The unfinished state of the poem has necessarily confined our extracts to that part which treats particularly of the opinions and superstitions of various nations & sects concerning a future state, and eternity. We shall therefore close the selection with the lines in which the author alludes to the imperfect knowledge of the ancient Jews, and commences a contemplation on the more perfect and glorious light of the gospel dispensation. -

* * * Ev'n the chosen race -
Whom God in love and wondrous mercy led
Safe thro' the surges of the Egyptian sea,
Safe thro' the terrors of the wilderness,
Safe thro' the serried ranks of mortal foes,
Toward the land of promise - ev'n that race
Tho' far in heavenly wisdom & in light
Above the rest of men - he did not bless
With the full tide of knowledge. Even they
Knew not the richness of celestial joy.

To them God shone in terror; from the top
Of blazing Sinai was his law proclaimed
Mid fire & thunderings, & the brazen voice
Of angel trumps, & darkness thick as night;
And holy men from time to time reveal'd
As taught by His good spirit, to the ears
Of Israel's wayward tribes, successive gleams
Of that unknown hereafter which their hearts
The longing soul. But to the general race
Dim were the tidings. It was not the hour
For glorious light. The best intelligence
Of heaven & happiness was not for them
Destined to break in glory. As they gazed
Still brighter grew the radiance from on high;
Ages on ages roll'd, & prophets rose
To whose keen eye the Spirit of God disclos'd
Its yet imperfect vision.

Till at length,
The darkness burst — the glorious day-beam dawn'd
The day-spring woke on high! The gates of morn
Unclosing, pour'd the tide of joyous light!
O'er the dim earth there rose a living ray,
Upon the barren void & desolate waste
Of sin it rose in all its beautiful bloom,
And GOD himself descended to unfold
The tidings yet imperfectly reveal'd;
Veil'd in our flesh, he came to bid us live,
Bring life and Immortality to light,
And make us heirs of heaven. O glorious deed!
O wondrous condescension! grace divine!
He bleeds & dies — that to our darken'd gaze
Eternity might bloom — and heaven receive
The wanderers from his bounty & his love!

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E.